PUBLIC FORUM ON THE FOX RIVER CLEAN UP

COMMENTS of DR. PETER DEFUR

1. Is the process of "capping" - or covering up - PCB contaminated sediments in the Fox River a permanent solution?

Capping contaminated sediment is an attempt to cover up the problem rather than cleanup the sediments or remove the contamination. Capping can fail to prevent contamination if the "cap" fails, if groundwater pushes through from underneath, or if something tears up the "cap" from above. Ships, ice, or storms could damage the "cap."

2. Is there any other navigable river that has been capped, and if so, did it eliminate all PCB risks to both human health and wildlife?

The other rivers that have used "capping" as a means of treating contaminated sediments are non-navigable, have only been in place for a short while, or are in coastal marine waters. Coastal waters and bays are generally deeper, not subject to river flow forces or ice, and have little or no groundwater pushing up from beneath. Capping the PCB contaminated sediments has yet to eliminate risks to human health and wildlife.

3. Are you aware of any other river sediments contaminated by PCBs that have been remediated by burying processes? If so, what data exist to prove that it was successful or that it has failed?

The other systems that I know have used "capping" for PCB contaminated sediments are 1) the Lower Duwamish which failed after about 3 years, 2) the Spokane, that just installed a cap recently, 3) the Grasse River that still has contaminated fish problems and 4) the Manistique River that extensively dredged the contaminated sediments prior to capping. In addition, the James River, VA used natural burial for the Kepone contaminated sediments in 1975. Kepone is still measured in fish from the James R, albeit at low levels. There is very little evidence from monitoring fish, water and sediments that capping solves the contamination problem.

4. In your expert opinion, do you believe that the PCBs in the Fox River should be buried or "capped" ?

In my professional opinion, the Fox River is not a site suited to capping the contaminated sediments. The contaminated sediments instead should be removed from the river without delay.

ABOUT DR. PETER DEFUR:

Dr. deFur is chair of the Board of the Science and Environmental Health Network (SEHN), President of the Association for Science in the Public Interest, and recently completed a term on the National Research Council Board on Environmental Studies and Toxicology (BEST). Dr. deFur is an Affiliate Associate Professor in the Center for Environmental Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he conducts research on environmental health and ecological risk assessment. During the past ten years, deFur has been extensively involved in scientific, regulatory and policy concerning the generation, release and discharge of dioxin-related compounds. He has published a number of papers on regulation and policy aspects of these compounds, considered in many ways prototype endocrine disruptors. Since 1991, he has been extensively involved in the EPA reassessment of dioxin.